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SUBJECT: NORTH KIVU GOVERNOR'S OUTLOOK ON NKUNDA AND FDLR

Classified By: Charge S. Brock (1.4 b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: North Kivu Governor Julien Paluku outlined his and the GDRC's emerging approach to dealing with the twin problems of dissident General Laurent Nkunda and FDLR fighters in the province. He said the central government wants to exhaust diplomatic and political options before pursuing the use of force against Nkunda and his loyalists. An inter-ethnic dialogue is being planned for mid-September to begin discussion on common solutions to the region's political and security concerns. By contrast, Paluku believes military operations are the only remaining way to eliminate the threat of the FDLR. He appealed for greater USG involvement in the region, particularly through increased diplomatic pressure on Rwanda. End summary.

¶2. (C) North Kivu Governor Julien Paluku met with PolOff in Kinshasa August 29 following a discussion of several hours with President Kabila on the region's security problems. Paluku said Kabila is greatly concerned about the increasing tensions and violence in the province. He said Kabila remains deeply engaged in attempts to find ways to eliminate the threats posed by both dissident General Laurent Nkunda and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). Paluku said Kabila intends to follow a three-pronged strategy in the coming weeks and months: diplomatic, political, and military.

¶3. (C) According to Paluku, Kabila's first approach to resolving the Kivus' problems will be diplomatic. He cited the upcoming meeting with Rwandan Foreign Minister Murigande, Ugandan President Museveni and the next session of the Tripartite Plus Commission as opportunities to address common concerns and foster better relations. The second approach will be political and include several steps. Initially, there will be organization of an inter-ethnic dialogue among various Kivus actors, including politicians, religious groups, civil society, and community leaders. Paluku added that representatives of Nkunda will be invited to participate, but not Nkunda himself. The session is tentatively scheduled for September 10-15, but Paluku said the government has not determined if it will be held in Goma, Bukavu or Kisangani. Paluku added that officials are currently searching for a neutral third party who could preside over these initial sessions. The third option under consideration would be military action against Nkunda and his loyalists. Paluku stressed that Kabila is resolved to use force only if the first two approaches fail. He said he does not support military operations because of the humanitarian consequences the fighting would have on civilians.

¶4. (C) Paluku took a much harder line on the FDLR. He openly called for military action against the group as soon as possible. Paluku said the first step should be renewed

efforts to convince the rank-and-file to return to Rwanda, though he admitted such efforts will unlikely be successful. He proposed creating several "transit" camps in western North Kivu where FDLR members would willingly go (or later forcibly sent) for repatriation. In parallel, Paluku said trained and integrated FARDC troops should take limited military action against FDLR leaders. He admitted such operations carry a risk of retaliation by the FDLR against civilians if the initial attacks are incomplete or unsuccessful.

15. (C) Paluku added that another element to any successful outcome in the Kivus is the cooperation of Rwandan authorities. He said additional diplomatic pressure must be placed on Kigali and President Kagame to encourage FDLR members to return to Rwanda. Paluku said Kigali must be pressured into opening up political space for their return and initiating its own national reconciliation process. Paluku defended the DRC's inability to eliminate the FDLR, questioning why Rwandan forces were unable to do so during their five-year occupation in the Kivus.

16. (C) Paluku appealed for greater USG assistance, primarily through diplomatic pressure on Rwanda. He said the U.S. can play an active role in resolving the region's security problems, particularly because of its influence with neighboring governments. Paluku also asked for additional training and assistance to build military capacity. He specifically cited an initiative supported by the Defense Minister Chikez Diemu and FARDC CHOD General Kayembe to build barracks for the integrated brigades. Paluku said such a concrete initiative would go a long way to improving the lives of soldiers and reducing threats to local populations.

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17. (C) Comment: Paluku's outlook on North Kivu's security situation is generally reflective of the range of solutions to Nkunda and the FDLR being proposed by the central government. What they lack is a clear vision of the end state. Dialogue and diplomacy are the really only viable options regarding the integration of Nkunda's forces and the reduction of ethnic tensions in the province. The military is too weak and ill-equipped to confront Nkunda directly, and the humanitarian consequences of military operations would be dire. By contrast, officials appear to have no solution other than military to address the FDLR question, despite the dangers involved. Like Paluku, they are seeking greater USG involvement in both areas. End comment.

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